

at a steep angle and at other times by the birds of a big flight suddenly breaking their formation and losing height by a series of fantastic dives at a great speed and in all directions accompanied by a loud noise from the impact of air in their feathers.

C/O GRINDLAY & Co.,
BOMBAY.

G. DE LA P. BERESFORD,
Major-General.

January, 1944.

6.—BIRDS OF BOMBAY.

I read with interest in your issue of December 1942, the note by the Bishop of Bombay on the birds of his Malabar Hill garden in Bombay (Vol. xliii, No. 3, p. 525). If space permits, I should like to add some complementary observations on the birds of a very different habitat, situated some three miles away on the opposite side of Back Bay. I refer to the area of open common land and tidal mudflat known as the Colaba Reclamation, now alas owing to wartime exigencies, becoming an increasingly built-up area.

During the months of August, September and November, 1943, this small oasis of nature afforded me many an evening's happy hunting with a pair of binoculars. My reference bible has been Sálím Ali and H. Abdulali's 'Birds of Bombay and Salsette', an invaluable working basis, which I shall hereafter refer to as 'BBS'. These notes are submitted as a further contribution to the facts and figures there recorded.

The half-reclaimed basins of tidal mudflat are first and foremost a refuge and feeding ground for a large assembly of waders, most of which arrived and either settled in or passed through during the period under review. First species to claim mention is the Common Sandpiper. Previous observation in nearly every month of the year confirms that its status is certainly that of resident, though presumably non-breeding. One or more were to be seen on every visit, usually away from the motley throng for the Sandpiper is an individualist who is not confined to the crowded mudflat. In the first half of August the only other true waders seen were a small party, which I doubtfully identified as Grey Plover; they only appeared once. On August 21, the scene had become transformed from one of damp desolation to one of feverish activity, and on August 25, a rough count yielded 180 Sand Plover, 15 Stint, 8 Redshank, 8 Whimbrel, 7 Dunlin, 6 Turnstone, and 2 Greenshank. It was a pleasant surprise to recognise so many old friends often watched in the U.K. It will be noted that the arrival date of Stint is a month ahead of September 25, given as the earliest date in BBS. By the beginning of September, the Stint were as numerous as the Sand Plover and, as far as could be seen, were all *Erolia minuta*; no Temminck's have yet been noted. Dunlin, though noted in BBS as 'uncommon' also became as numerous as the Sand Plover by September 7. The Sand Plover was a new species to me, and as I failed to detect variations in size or plumage with any certainty I presume my notes must refer only to the Pamirs Lesser Sand Plover. They were first observed on August 21, as compared with September 13, given as earliest date in BBS. Throughout September and November (I was away

during October) the above three species remained the principal clientele of the mudflats, feeding in mixed flocks of several hundreds.

The Redshank and Greenshank,—the latter easily spotted at long range by his practice of feeding apart, probing his recurved bill from side to side with a scythe-like motion—have remained fairly constant in numbers, the largest total being 15 Redshank and 4 Greenshank recorded on November 22. In view of the scant records of the occurrence of Turnstone (none since 1875 according to BBS), it is of particular interest that about a dozen were first observed on August 21, and subsequently an average of 6 have nearly always been present. I have frequently watched them at close quarters, sometimes scattered in mixed flocks, sometimes feeding in one compact party. On September 14, I was surprised by the odd behaviour of one individual who was running about among the coarse grass and pebbles beside the sea wall busily turning over the latter and quite oblivious of my presence as I stood watching only 3 paces away.

Of all waders the wary Whimbrel was the most unapproachable, and his presence was often only betrayed by his piping titteel or a glimpse of his strong twisting flight as he disappeared into the dusk. He has remained a constant visitor to the mudflats since first noted on August 25.

On September 2, I observed a solitary Golden Plover in full summer plumage. On September 15, 40-50 had arrived, some in summer, some in winter plumage. They were still present up to the end of November, but fluctuated considerably in numbers from as many as 100 on some days to none at all on others. They are wild and wary creatures, especially when in a large flock, and at times they seemed to infect the other waders with their nervousness. On November 4, I again suspected the presence of Grey Plover, but bad light prevented confirmation. On September 4, I had the pleasure of recognising for the first time a Black-winged Stilt,—BBS gives earliest date as September 29. On September 13 there were two and I found them very easy to approach. By the 29th they had gone; perhaps the slackening of the monsoon had left the mud no longer deep or soft enough for their liking.

So much for the waders. One other transient visitor worthy of mention was a party of 22 duck which appeared on September 12 and was present in dwindling numbers till the end of the month. They nervously kept well out in the middle and I could only doubtfully identify them as Gadwall. The Herons and Egrets have been constantly represented by the ubiquitous Paddy Bird (up to 20 at a time), by Cattle Egrets, Reef Herons, both white and slaty-grey, one or two solitary Grey Herons, and by possibly the Purple Heron.

I would like now to mention briefly some of the other more interesting visitors to the Reclamation. I will not attempt to list all of the 60 odd species so far noted, as such a list not covering a whole season would, necessarily be very incomplete. Two or three Desert Wheatears were first observed on November 14 along the sea wall (BBS gives November 12 as earliest date). A Rufous-backed Shrike has taken up his stance on the waste land and was first noted on September 29; a Wood Shrike has once been

seen. Whitethroats which had probably arrived in October were observed singing their fidgety little song on November 10. A party of Brahminy Mynas put in an appearance at the end of the month. Pairs and small parties of White-throated Munias have been seen periodically and on October 5, they were in company with several Red Munia (escapes?). A Yellow-throated Sparrow was seen on the same date.

The first of the wagtails appeared on September 12, a *Motacilla flava* (subsp.?). The first White Wagtail was seen on October 5, three days after earliest date given in BBS, and during November they had become the commonest of the wagtails. A solitary handsome roller seemed to have taken up his winter quarters, and was first seen on October 5; several Hoopoes had done the same, the first being noted on September 18 which is earlier than the BBS date October 12. The first bee-eaters to arrive were the blue-tailed species (Blue-checked?—Eds.). They were first seen on Sept. 19, and quite a large number were observed up to October 5; on my return at the beginning of November, all had disappeared and their place was taken by numerous Common Bee-eaters whose advance guard had appeared on October 2. The White-fronted Kingfisher and the common Indian Kingfisher have both been seen at other times of the year on the Reclamation and deserve mention if only for their attractive finery.

Concerning hawks and their like, a solitary Kestrel was seen on November 14 and two days previously I had had a close view of a White-eyed Buzzard-Eagle, who may have come to stay as he was seen several times up to December 4, when I left Bombay. Apart from Kites—and the Brahminy has been seldom observed—the one other constant visitor has been a fine specimen of a Harrier. After a number of close views I have identified him with reasonable certainty as an immature Pale Harrier, the ruff being more distinct than in the very similar Montagu's. Since his first appearance on September 29, I have watched him many times harrying up and down his chosen beat with that characteristic easy grace and poise which is such a pleasure to behold.

R.A. MESS,
BOMBAY.

R. K. MARTIN,
Lieut.

January 20, 1944.

[The authors of BBS would welcome bird notes from Bombay and Salsette, especially relating to seasonal annual migratory movements, nesting (where unrecorded), ecology etc. The notes are not intended for publication in the *Journal* but for use in the 2nd revised edition of BBS now under preparation.—Eds.]

7.—SOME NOTES ON THE MOVEMENT OF BIRDS IN THE LOVEDALE NEIGHBOURHOOD—NILGIRIS.

This winter (1943-4) migration appears to have been rather later than usual. Perhaps this was due to the particularly bad weather conditions of late August and early part of September, but not altogether as the Drongos were also late in arriving in October.